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# Protest Through Presence: Spatial Citizenship and Identity Formation in Contestations of Neoliberal Crises

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*ABSTRACT* We live in a contested, crisis-prone era, indicative of ongoing processes of neoliberalization. The most recent global financial and food crises have disproportionately impacted those already marginalized in society: people of colour and the working classes. The spatial expressions of this disproportionality are especially acute, evidenced by the uneven distribution of the basic necessities of food and home. Activists in the USA are responding with forms of spatial citizenship, namely exercising their right to peaceably assemble and reclaiming public spaces. During the creation of spaces of dissent, we observe the fluid formation of a collective spatialized identity among social movement actors, contingent on political identities and ideology. We use two cases based in Florida to highlight these processes. The first case is a local iteration of the Occupy Wall Street protests, Occupy Gainesville, which has occupied the city's most central public gathering place, the Bo Diddley Community Plaza. The second case involves Food Not Bombs in the city of Orlando where attempts were made to ban the group from distributing food in public parks to the homeless and working poor. First, these cases highlight the spatiotemporal relationships between unjust economic systems and the state surveillance and policing apparatus and those resisting such systems. Second, they reveal how collective identity influences and in turn is influenced by space. Our article furthers a processual, dynamic understanding of activist mobilizations to reduce the uneven burdens of neoliberalization and argues for greater attention to the spatialities of contentious politics.

**KEY WORDS:** Financial crisis, food crisis, space, spatial politics, citizenship, collective identity, neoliberalization

This article investigates how contemporary neoliberal crises influence the ways social movements engage space and subsequently how space impacts activism and the identity of social movement activists. In 2008, two major crises set off a new wave of global contestation, one involving food and agriculture and the other based in the financial sector, both of which reduced economic, political and food security (Von Braun, 2008; see Figure 1). Two distinct moments in Florida highlight how these crises result in distinctly spatial responses as part of the ongoing contestation of neoliberalization.<sup>1</sup> The first is a local iteration of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protests, Occupy Gainesville (OG), which

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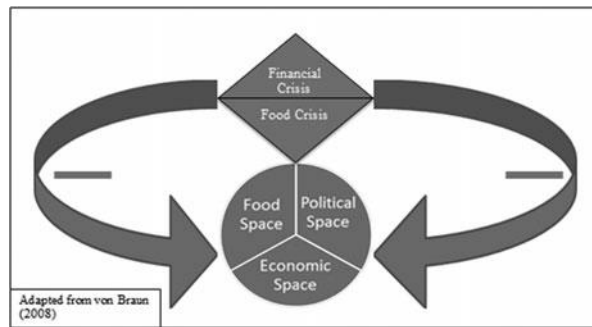


Figure 1. Crises of neoliberalization and their spatial impact.

regularly gathered through March 2013 at the city's most frequently used public gathering place, the Bo Diddley Community Plaza, albeit in increasingly small numbers. The second involves Food Not Bombs (FNB) in the city of Orlando where attempts were made to ban the group from distributing food in public parks to the homeless and working poor.

Research on social movements approaches resistance in myriad ways, whether as activist response to inequitable distribution of resources; lack of protection by the state for racial, ethnic, gender, sexual and/or religious minorities; the commodification of everyday life due to capitalism and/or the destruction of healthy living conditions and local ecosystems (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Leitner, Sheppard, & Sziarto, 2008; Martin & Miller, 2003). To explain social inequalities and how they are contested, most sociologists link 'personal troubles' to 'public issues' via an engagement with history, employing what Mills (1956) terms the sociological imagination. However, few have attempted to link sociological *and* geographical imaginations in the study of social movements despite compelling reasons to do so (Featherstone, 2009; Tilly, 2000). We contend that the increasingly risky nature of capitalism and the policing of dissent produce a spatialized identity emerging out of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which protects the right to peaceably assemble in public space. Therefore, this article builds on the collective identity tradition (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) and the spatialities of contentious politics (Leitner et al., 2008) by investigating how the sociospatial processes of recent crisis-induced social movements produce new understandings of citizenship, mutually constituted by a spatialized identity.

We do this by developing the notion of *spatial citizenship*, defined by the dialectics of space, citizenship and identity. Holston (1998) ties space and citizenship through his notion of 'spaces of insurgent citizenship'. This notion is premised on an opposition to the modernist political project's monopoly on city planning and restricting citizenship to instrumentally rational expressions such as voting. In addition, we argue that spatial citizenship also arises in opposition to the uneven processes of neoliberalization, specifically the state facilitation of capital accumulation through privatization, deregulation, financialization and trade liberalization. Such aid to the private sector has been entrenched by the Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case, which allows for unlimited and anonymous funding of political candidates. Indeed, this decision highlights the logic of neoliberalization, colonizing a branch of government delegated to protect democracy but increasingly beholden to private interests.

Moreover, the market fundamentalism driving neoliberalization homogenizes and commodifies social relations; self-expression comes through what we purchase, display and horde (Veblen, 1994). As such, citizenship is expressed through membership in a political community where power is purchased by donations, lobbying and other commercialized means. This formal citizenship is not merely tied to the territory of the state but is enmeshed in global capital. Our substantive citizenship, then, is reduced to the status of consumer with rights to individually purchase anything we want as long as it is through 'free markets'. The state has an interest in maintaining control of public spaces to facilitate commerce and reduce the influence of radical political forms that seek to rupture this commercialized sociospatial reality.

Paradoxically, American citizens enjoy the right to freedom of speech, assembly and the press, but these rights are curtailed by the same political institutions that are supposed to uphold citizens' occupations of public spaces (Mitchell, 2003). As Tonkiss (2005) argues, there are also prohibitions based on class, race, gender and sexual identities

that operate in public space (and) mark the limits of everyday spatial citizenship [...]. While concepts of public space are meant to capture certain principles of equality and inclusion, the real life of public spaces shows how social distinctions work through spatial exclusions. (p. 79)

Public space, though, is socially produced through struggle and does not exist as an ideal form. For many, the 'right to the city' is fundamental to democracy. Lefebvre (1996) notes: 'The *right to the city* cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*' (p.158, emphasis in original). Interpretations range from the right to produce social space in more socially just and sustainable ways (Harvey, 1996, 2009) to the right to occupy and hold public space (Mitchell, 2003). Wanting to nuance our understanding of spatial politics, Purcell (2002) criticizes *a priori* assumptions about the right to the city that presume a working class politics that targets the vagaries of capitalism. He argues that an 'urban politics of the inhabitant' is needed to more nimbly negotiate the 'complex politics of scale, identity, and difference, among other struggles. The right to participation means that inhabitants will play a central role in the decisions that produce urban space' (Purcell, 2002, p. 106).

Building upon the understandings of these scholars, our notion of *spatial citizenship* entails much more than the passive citizenship found in contemporary American politics. Spatial citizens engage and reclaim public spaces in their quest for democracy. We borrow from Routledge (2003) the idea of 'convergence space', but ground it in the places where heterogeneous affinities are engaged to form alternatives to neoliberalization. Instead of looking at grassroots globalization networks, we focus on territories within which spatial citizenship operates, attending specifically to three elements grounding Routledge's (2003) notion of convergence space: (1) the associations between multiple social movements to generate shared visions that lead to collective action; (2) how specific places generate uneven practices of communication and facilitation and (3) the emergence of contested social relations around goals, ideologies and strategies.<sup>2</sup> As such, the closeted, individualized space of the voting booth is revealed as inadequate, even complicit, in the colonization of space and bodies by private interests and their state representatives.

## The Politics of Collective Spatialized Identity Formation

Spatial considerations are often overlooked in research on social movements (Martin & Miller, 2003). Specifically, we follow Martin and Miller's (2003) injunction that the 'spatial dimension of context—e.g. how key actors, organizations, and institutions relate to and affect other actors, organizations, and institutions across space' shapes mechanisms and processes within social movements' (p. 149). As argued by Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1989) earlier, 'spatiality is both context for and constitutive of dynamic processes of contention' (Martin & Miller, 2003, p. 149). Put simply, space and social movements are engaged in a dialectic of space transforming movements and movements transforming space.

Social movements are also shaped and transformed by identity. One of the most popular theoretical ways to understand how social movements arise, strategize and mobilize is collective identity formation (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). The collective identity tradition evolved to fill the agency gap left by its structurally focused predecessors (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Meyer, 2004). Polletta and Jasper (2001, p. 285) define collective identity as

an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly [... It] may have been first constructed by outsiders [...] who may still enforce it, but it depends on some acceptance by those to whom it is applied. [...] Collective identity carries with it positive feelings for other members of the group.

This perspective stands in stark contrast to social movement traditions that elevate rational choice and view political identities as static. Although collective identity operates in all movements, some of the most visible include sexuality and environmental movements, where movement emergence and continuance is tied to a group's identity and collective interest in changing political, social and cultural norms and practices. People join and show commitment to movements where there are shared identities and affective/solidaristic incentives for participation. Collective identity theories also encourage focusing on different types of tactical choices motivated by values rather than by instrumentally rational criteria, (de)construct or enact identity as a form of protest and reflect various identities already embedded in social, cultural and political practices (Bernstein, 2005). As such, achieving a collective identity and transforming a person's experience as a member of a particular group are often the intended goal of mobilization. However, this perspective is largely limited by a preference for social explanations tied to race, gender and sexuality without a serious treatment about how spatial identities are formed.

Although spatial considerations are often overlooked, some attempts seek to understand how space and identity are mutually constitutive. Enke (2007) employs a geographical lens to explore how gender, sexuality, class and race are constructed in the built environment among those challenging and reproducing various forms of privilege and power. She locates feminist activism in 'actual locations [...] in which activist communities came into being' where women altered and were influenced by gender, race, class and sexual relations (p. 4). While Enke (2007) represents a trend in research that works to understand how identity is formed in space, there is less recognition that there are spatial specific identities that attempt to bridge the particular concerns of race, gender,

class and sexuality within the universal right to peaceably assemble in public space. The politics and conduct of a spatialized citizenship require a more dynamic understanding of how different identities co-exist.

The literature on ‘autonomous geographies’ provides a useful framework for understanding the complexities of political activism, identity and citizenship within alter-globalization and anti-capitalist movements (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). In short, autonomous geographies are ‘multiscalar strategies that weave together spaces and times, constituting in-between and overlapping spaces, blending resistance and creation, and combining theory and practice’ (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006, p. 730). Our conceptualization of a collective spatialized identity recognizes that the politics and conduct of a citizen identity are contingent and contested in convergence spaces, which entail prefigurative political struggles over public space.

Harvey (2009) advocates for social movement efforts to reclaim the city, specifically making the case that it is vital to capture state power in order to slow down the process of capital accumulation and seize some surplus value to redistribute towards public ends. Yet, anti-capitalist efforts are imbricated with many other inequalities. As Chatterton and Heynen (2011) argue, ‘practices of resistance are necessarily diverse as they emerge out of the uneven conditions of contemporary social relations and everyday life struggles [...] what makes resistance powerful is to make surprising yet empowering connections between [...] different conditions’ (p. 519). As such, we highlight engagement with social movement efforts to (re)assert an inclusive politics premised on transforming exploitation and domination tied to systems of capitalism, racism, sexism and homophobia.

To better understand resistance practices at the intersection of identity and space, it is imperative to investigate the spatial forms of empowerment experienced by activists as they reclaim public space and make demands for economic and social justice. Many strategies do not attempt to take control over the levers of economic and political power. Instead, activists create autonomous geographies, whereby a general demand to a right to the city may be nuanced with (1) a pragmatism that embraces many values and is open to multiple political selves; (2) a recognition of economic and political constraints, while simultaneously building alternatives and resisting various injustices and (3) a commitment to building networks of solidarity in specific places through a composite set of spatial practices (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010). It is unclear whether anarchist ways of organization can lead to halting and/or slowing down the process of capital accumulation and the accumulation of political legitimacy into the hands of the state. It is, however, clear that universal claims to occupy public space on a local scale have arisen from myriad sectors of society and been acted upon in heterogeneous ways to meet the different needs of diverse constituencies. Thus, we attend to new forms of collective identity premised on the development of spatial citizenship and mutually constituted by the distinct exploitative and dominating spaces of neoliberalization.

## Neoliberalization in Crisis and the Formation of Spatialized Struggles

In order to understand the impact of economic and political crises in an era of neoliberalization on society’s most vulnerable populations, it is helpful to connect place-specific contestations. Below is a brief overview of two related crises, which provide the context for an analysis of how activists form collective spatialized identities in the midst of heterogeneous social movements where different political identities co-exist.

## *2008 Financial Crisis and Its Uneven Impacts*

Beginning in 2006, the USA began to see large numbers of poor people and people of colour losing their homes to foreclosure. It would not be until mid-2007 that the same foreclosure crisis began to hit white, middle-class Americans. Millions lost or were in the process of losing homes by the beginning of 2008; yet, in that same year, 'Wall Street bonuses added up to \$32 billion, just a fraction less than the total in 2007' (Harvey, 2010, p. 2). The proximate cause of this crisis was the collapse of the housing bubble.<sup>3</sup> By late 2010, US housing prices declined by around 30%, while the number of homeowners in mid-2011 owing more on their homes than they are worth numbered roughly 12 million (28% of homeowners) (Curnutte, 2011; Maitland & Blitzer, 2011).

This subprime mortgage crisis resulted because banks lent out many high-risk loans at very low interest rates. As the housing market boomed, financial institutions and investors from around the world invested in the US housing market through mortgage-backed security and collateralized debt obligation agreements. Increasing numbers of people defaulted on loans and were unable to pay back the banks. Therefore, the financial institutions and investors, the banks and the insurance companies that backed these risky investments experienced huge losses. The US government then bailed out the banks.

Although the crisis was widespread, it was racially and geographically uneven. This was due in large part to 'reverse redlining', where lenders targeted black and Latino neighbourhoods with subprime mortgages (Bocian, Li, & Ernst, 2010). Cities with large minority populations, such as San Diego, Las Vegas and Miami, experienced much larger bubbles than elsewhere, while Florida was subject to the highest rates of subprime lending in the country. Currently, 38.8% of mortgages are subprime and 29.3% of homes are in foreclosure (Mortgage Map, 2011).

Other major economic indicators reveal that Americans are continuing to struggle. In the third quarter of 2011, white unemployment was 8%, while black and Latino unemployment rates were 16% and 11.3%, respectively (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Median wealth for whites in 2009 was \$113,149 (drop of 16% from 2005), while for blacks it was \$5,677 (drop of 53% from 2005) and Latinos, \$6,325 (drop of 66% from 2005) (Taylor, Fry, & Kochhar, 2011). The poverty levels are equally as stratified as the national poverty rate is 16% with roughly 14% of whites living in poverty compared to 25% of blacks and 28% of Latino/as (Short, 2011).

The overall result is what Dienst (2011) calls a 'crisis of indebtedness', which operates not only in the sense that ledgers are in the red, but in 'the social and psychic relations that make economic debts possible' (p. 13). Dienst (2011) argues that a fundamental reason for these crises is the systematized social relations upon which capitalism depends. These relations include, but are not limited to, collusion between the state, financial institutions and multinational corporations; social hierarchy premised on the state's monopoly on violence through police and surveillance forces and social faith in dominant institutions.

## *A Contested Food Crisis and Its Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Groups*

Many people will remember the footage of Haitian women and children forming mud cakes in the wake of the 2008 food crisis. These mud cakes, made from clay or dirt, shortening or oil and salt are used in times of crisis to stave off death. At this time, the cost

of basic staples skyrocketed around the world. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2011) food price index used to average prices for a given basket of food reached a record high level in 2008 of 213.5, only to be topped again in 2011 at 214.7. Recorded spikes in wheat, maize, rice, sugar, dairy, meat and oilseeds drove up the cost of food around the world. The food crisis is a symptom of the organization of our global agrifood system itself, a key handmaiden of neoliberalization (McMichael, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

The agrifood system relies on industrialized farming techniques that cause numerous ecological problems through a rule-governed structure that displaces peasant knowledge and culture throughout the Global South, while appropriating land for export crops which require price supports and subsidies (Carolan, 2011). Moreover, this system externalizes health (malnutrition) and access (undernutrition) problems throughout the Global North. These problems result from 'supermarket redlining' and demarcated devaluation whereby industrial, residential and food retail capital flows out of communities contributing to a loss of control and autonomy over local spaces of production and consumption (Eisenhauer, 2001; McClintock, 2011).

The rising cost of food was met with protest in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d' Ivoire, Egypt, Haiti, Indonesia, Mozambique, Senegal, Somalia, Yemen and other countries. In 2011, protests and riots spread to Algeria, Jordan, India and Mexico. In what was to set off a wave of protests throughout the Arab world, food inflation played a crucial role in the ouster of longtime Tunisian president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian president Muhammad Hosni Sayyid Mubarak. Although protest over food prices reflected economic and social disenfranchisement, they were compounded by a widespread perception that political elites failed to equitably govern (Lagi, Bertrand, & Bar-Yam, 2011). Similar to the bread riots of yore, access to affordable food proved a rallying point for people with unresolved grievances and catalysed widespread social change (Tarrow, 1998; Tilly, 1978).<sup>5</sup>

The food crisis impacted the USA as well. Although Americans spend less of their average income on food than ever before, the absolute cost of food is at an all-time high (Carolan, 2011). The year 2010 saw the highest number of food-insecure<sup>6</sup> people *ever* recorded in the USA, with 17.2 million households insecure (14.5% of households) (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2011). Food insecurity is also recognizable in the number of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients, more commonly known as food stamps. In May 2011, food stamp usage hit an all-time high with 45,753,078 people and 21,581,234 households, an increase of about 20 million people and 10 million households since 2007 (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2011). Nevertheless, this government assistance does not ameliorate food access problems caused by neoliberal and racialized systems of food production and distribution, which produce grocery gaps and transportation gaps between consumers and healthy food options (Brown & Getz, 2011; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; McClintock, 2011). In total, the impacts of the food crisis were felt around the world, setting off a new wave contentious politics that washed up onto the shores of Florida.

## The Spatial Politics of Dissent in Florida

The recent responses to these crises by the Occupy movement and FNB resulted in new forms of solidarity through public enactments of citizenship, which result in collective spatialized identities. Moreover, activists are linking these multiple crises to the process of



'rollback' and 'rollout' neoliberalism (Peck & Tickel, 2002) dominating geopolitics and economics, resulting in those on the economic periphery finding the procurement of livelihood essentials more difficult.<sup>7</sup> Control over public places, then, becomes central to working towards alternative organizational structures that do not produce the same inequitable outcomes.

### *Gainesville: Cooperation and Contestation in Uneven Social Relations*

In a sign of things to come, the magazine *Adbusters* released the September/October 2011 issue with a bold cover proclamation, 'Post Anarchism'. Inside were the campaign materials that would spark the OWS movement, calling for an ongoing demonstration at Tahrir Square in Egypt. The lead article by Saul Newman titled 'The Politics of Post Anarchism' was coupled with a rallying call for people to come together to challenge the financial sector for (re)producing myriad economic, political, social and ecological problems. This call was in direct response to the argument that there is a legitimization crisis of leftist politics. On the one hand, Marxist analyses have often overlooked the importance of identity politics and the politics of the nation state, glossing over the individual agency necessary to resist unjust authority. On the other hand, a post-structural analysis has at times overlooked the role capitalism plays in defining freedom. The left is now re-engaging with anarchism, albeit in a post-anarchist way that contests authority while remaining open to a plurality of struggles and identities (Newman, 2010).

The plurality of the OWS movement became clear as thousands of cities were soon home to OWS-inspired events and occupations (Occupy Together, 2012). Much of the movement discourse hinged on the idea that 'The banks got bailed out. We got sold out' and 'They are the 1%. We are the 99%'. This wave of solidarity hit Gainesville, Florida, where on 5 October 2011, local activists sat down for the first general assembly at the Bo Diddley Plaza and have been meeting and organizing through March 2013. OG's statement of purpose, developed through consensus, articulates a prefigurative utilization of space that mirrors much of the Occupy movement:

Occupy Gainesville is about engaging the people of our community in grassroots, participatory democracy. We are about diversity and dialogue. We stand in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street Movement and the rest of the people peacefully occupying public space across this country and the rest of the world. This is about collectively awakening to the way we live, and consciously choosing a better way. (Occupy Gainesville [OG], 2013)

The space occupied by OG has, however, been the nexus of the Gainesville homeless community for years, leading to moments of strained relations between the two groups. During a general assembly, a homeless man highlighted the contradictions of how space is claimed by OG. After overhearing an OG participant comment about problems, other Occupy movements experienced with transient homeless populations partaking in the meals reserved for activists and hearing OG participants call 'Whose plaza?' and respond 'Our plaza!', the man spoke up. For the past two years, he came to the Bo Diddley Plaza upon completing work to be with other homeless people. He told OG that he has never taken OG's food; therefore, OG should not generalize about the homeless. He ended his

comments by noting that he and other homeless people had been occupying the plaza for much longer than OG.

This episode is emblematic of the contested meanings of space, even by groups ostensibly on the same side of political and economic issues. Indeed, it highlights a divide among the '99%' and the privilege of activists able to choose to occupy public space in protest versus those occupying space because they have no other options. This privilege is clear as Gainesville police originally chose to work with the mainly white OG protestors and not arrest them for sleeping on sidewalks, while arresting the largely black homeless people for the same, politically unmotivated behaviour. With time, OG activists built greater solidarity with the homeless, in part because a few early and active members of OG were facing homelessness given their own dire financial circumstances. Moreover, as OG activists began sleeping on the sidewalks, some of the homeless became politically activated, sparking a working relationship with the area's homeless population to bridge the divide. There is now an ongoing struggle that has mobilized once divided segments of the '99%' to legalize the right to sleep in the park overnight. This is especially important as Gainesville is renowned for its antipathy towards the homeless, earning the ignominy of the nation's fifth 'meanest city to the homeless' by the National Coalition for the Homeless.<sup>8</sup> Related to the class and racial divides in political battles for public space are ideological splits, which have pitted free market libertarians against anti-capitalist anarchists.

The libertarian contingent of OG is most concerned with how the US government provided a \$700 billion bailout to the banking system. Similarly, they are angry that the Federal Reserve gave \$16 trillion between 2007 and 2010 to many of the world's banks, corporations and governments, most at 0% interest (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2011). This vocal minority wants to 'end the Fed', latching onto a discourse that often overlooks local poverty and the uneven impact on Gainesville's black community. Thus, there are contested spatialities embedded in OG's efforts on the one hand to transform institutions that perpetuate inequality and on the other hand to match the populist framing of the 99% with concrete efforts to equalize local social relations. In the midst of contested social relations, OG has nonetheless managed to collectively visualize and generate solidarity through direct action.

Over time, OG slowly escalated their assertion of spatial citizenship. After months of building respect, understanding and a collective spatialized identity among the 50 or so most active participants, discussions began to be held about 'taking back our plaza'. As one musically gifted activist put it in a song titled 'It's Time to Occupy' (2012):

Just yesterday they told us we couldn't sing our songs.

Well let me ask one question, 'where has our freedom gone?'

It's time to occupy. Draw a line in the sand.

It's time to occupy. It's time to take a stand.

This stand took the form of maintaining a presence after official park hours in the centre of the plaza, a space deemed off limits by a local city ordinance. The 'peaceful sit-in to take Bo Diddley Community Plaza' was the culmination of a day's worth of events that took place on Veteran's Day, 11 November 2011. Beginning at 11:30pm, the time that the plaza officially closed, around 30 activists refused to leave until police officers arrived and began removing them. A total of 24 people faced legal consequences for participating in

civil disobedience, 21 of whom were simply given citations to appear before a judge the following morning, and 3 of whom were booked and taken to jail. Facing and experiencing arrest are common experiences for Occupy activists around the world. Over 7700 people have been arrested in 122 cities since OWS began on 17 September 2011 (Occupy Arrests, 2013).

A sense of family has developed within OG, especially for those experiencing economic challenges that would lead to homelessness and those facing arrest for exercising their right to freely assemble. Bo Diddley Plaza has become a space of belonging where both material support and political community are provided. One activist said that OG 'is home. We have family here'. Her partner commented, 'If these people weren't here, we wouldn't be here [...] we would probably be living in our truck in a Wal-Mart parking lot' (Cherkis & Kenigsberg, 2011). Without the regular taking of public space, the ability to form a community around shared ideals would be limited. These activists are in turn forming a collective spatialized identity through the enactment of their right to peaceably assemble. The response to the 2008 food crisis follows a similar path as space is the nexus of contestation, whereby FNB activists escalated their tactics in the name of first amendment rights *and* the right for hungry people to be fed.

### *Orlando: Contesting the Surveillance and Police State Through Geographies of Solidarity*

FNB is a global, decentralized movement to redistribute food that would otherwise go wasted to the poor and homeless. There are over 1000 chapters in over 60 countries working to bring awareness to issues related to poverty, specifically the fact that spending on militaries and war is often directly tied to social stratification within and between societies. Non-hierarchically organized and steeped in the combined anarchist principles of freedom and equality, each autonomous FNB chapter expresses spatial citizenship through consensus decision-making. Although there are universal claims made by FNB that elevate human dignity above waging war, each chapter makes particular, context-specific claims. At core is a 'politics of visibility' which not only makes 'poverty visible in the hope of altering the geography of survival and the biopolitics of neo-liberalism', but also makes 'the politics of making *resistance* visible' (Heynen, 2010, p. 1235). This politics is premised on a universal commitment to non-violent direct action.

In the Orlando metropolitan area in 2009, there were around 10,000 homeless people (Santich, 2009). However, in the greater Orlando area, including Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties, it was estimated that there were at least 30,000 people in 2007 who experienced homelessness at some point during the year (Mayor's Working Committee on Homelessness, 2007). Orlando FNB claim that

they share food because people need it and as a means of calling attention to our society's failure to provide food and housing to each of its members. We do this in public spaces, such as parks, because we believe that space should be reclaimed for the use of everyone, not just the privileged. (Orlando FNB, 2011)

Homelessness is public; so, FNB publically addresses this problem.

Demonizing radical activists to marginalize their views or strategies is a common tactic used by the state to legitimate domination (Fernandez, 2008). In 2006, the city of Orlando passed an ordinance that banned the feeding of homeless in downtown parks, but FNB

continued to feed while they waged a legal battle to keep the park open. On September 26, 2008, a federal judge permanently enjoined the city of Orlando from enforcing the ban on feeding homeless. However, an April 2011 ruling by the Federal 11th District Court of Appeals in Atlanta again barred anyone from feeding the homeless in downtown public parks. In response, FNB continued the practice in Lake Eola Park despite Mayor Buddy Dyer's public reference to FNB activists as 'food terrorists'. This comment came after five years of conflict between the city of Orlando and FNB. The transforming of FNB from saints assisting the marginalized into terrorists sowing fear in public parks led to the justification of a set of spatial policing tactics that became the critical point around which FNB activists exercised spatial citizenship. Indeed, there is a long history of surveillance of FNB chapters given their unequivocal call to end all war and redistribute society's resources. Activists, though, resisted the urge for internal policing (Foucault, 1988) and instead publicly asserted a right to the city. However, FNB nuances universal claims to using non-violent direct action in order to take back space by relying on an analysis that links interlocking forms of hierarchy, which provides a base from which to ground identity politics in a broader political project (Heynen, 2010).

When FNB's Orlando chapter started defying the city ordinance restricting feeding of the homeless in public parks to two times a year, the mayor engaged in a series of discursive and spatial strategies to curtail these efforts. In terms of discourse, Dyer said: 'I think they are using food or the feeding of the homeless for different purposes' (Ng, 2011). This statement taps into a set of discourses used against FNB beginning in 1989 after FNB activists in San Francisco began getting arrested for providing vegan meals to the city's homeless. At the time, the military was holding classes in San Francisco on domestic terrorism, where FNB was a case study among 'America's Most Hardcore Terrorist Groups'. In terms of space, after arresting numerous FNB activists who kept feeding people in Lake Eola Park, the city offered to allow FNB to feed people on the steps of city hall. These policing tactics were meant to place FNB within the surveying eye of the state. Moreover, this would minimize the number of underserved people that FNB would be able to reach; there are many homeless who can more easily access food in Lake Eola Park than in front of city hall and who do not want to be directly in the shadow of the state.

The collective spatialized identity of FNB activists was expressed in the escalating commitment to occupying Lake Eola Park in the face of arrest threats. On 1 June 2011, the city of Orlando began enforcing the ordinance limiting groups to feeding 25 or less homeless people twice a year in downtown parks. In a sign of the struggle to come, FNB co-founder Jonathan Keith McHenry, and OFNB activists Benjamin Markeson and Jessica Cross refused to abide by the ordinance and were arrested for feeding 40 people. FNB continued occupying the park twice a week. Over a 2-month period, 29 arrests were made. One arrested activist said: 'Free speech two times a year? That's what the ordinance says. I believe in liberty, so I will get arrested if I have to' (Schlueb & Jacobson, 2011). One sarcastic activist pointed out the contradictions in the state's absurd notion of citizenship:

You can count on the Orlando Police Department to enforce the law [...] no matter what it is. We have to support them for that. In America the last thing you need is liberty, justice, and conscience getting in the way of the law. We need to have officers that blindly obey and do what they are told [...] Sometimes you have to have tyranny to have freedom. (Orlando Cop Watch, 2011)

Many citizens regulate personal behaviour in line with how law is enforced, but the case of FNB reveals that once people begin to spatially assert citizenship, a spatialized identity begins to form in opposition to the interests of those who give police orders to regulate space.

### Realizing Spatial Citizenship through Platforms, Portals and Places

The foregoing investigation of OG and FNB supports the notion that

the active *taking* of space—has been the fulcrum upon which the right to the city has been leveraged, both in its actual (limited) practice and in the way that it can serve as a beacon for a more open, more just, more egalitarian society. (Mitchell, 2003, p. 10)

This dynamic process is constantly reformulated through consensus seeking within transparent public spaces, necessarily leading to uneven practices of communication and facilitation and the emergence of contested social relations. However, we show that when police and surveillance forces harass protestors and threaten and carry out arrests, geographies of solidarity across identity fault lines emerge. Roberts (2011) contends that such ‘community-based power’, essentially the formation of a spatially engaged citizenry, depends on the development of ‘platforms, portals and places’: *platforms* are necessary for participation and consensus decision-making; *portals* are needed for real-time communication, whether in person or via social media and non-commodified *places* are essential for social learning and actualizing a non-hierarchical democratic vision. Figure 2 provides a visual depiction of this process-based relationship, as spatial citizenship is realized through platforms, portals and places and, in turn, forms and reforms a collective spatialized identity.

#### *Platforms*

Platforms are the tactics used to develop and/or realize alternatives to how institutions generally operate. For example, our cases point to the use of direct consensus decision-making, one of the purest forms of direct democracy, as an alternative to institutionalized voting in a majority rules, representative democracy. These are most often open-ended

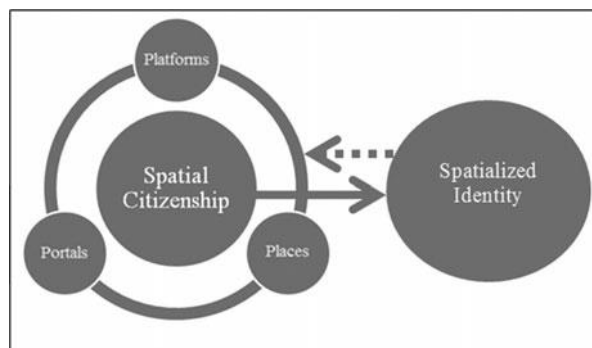


Figure 2. Expressions of spatial citizenship and the formation of spatialized identity.

forums for creative initiatives and experiments. Platforms are a subset of what are known as tactical repertoires, non-institutionalized forms of political expression used by social movements (Tilly, 2008). However, unlike tactical repertoires, which refer to strategies used by activists to influence the polity, platforms are aimed at enlarging the activist base itself in a type of prefiguration that eschews co-optation. The cases of OG and FNB show that a horizontal, leaderless strategy is paramount as these processes rest on elevating personal freedom and equality.

Representative of the platform of consensus decision-making, OG' s regular general assemblies are used to build solidarity and develop strategies to address and overcome grievances. The continual presence in downtown Gainesville, which provides regular spaces to communicate and organize, is fundamental to how spatial citizenship is expressed. The power of face-to-face communication through what has been dubbed 'the people' s mic' is evident at general assemblies. The person speaking is parroted by everyone else in attendance. This has the effect of not only amplifying what is said, but also reinforces a sense of solidarity between activists. Speaking and listening are mutually reinforced. This is important as democracy ends when communication ends (Habermas, 1984). The people' s mic represents a collective agreement to speak as one, to embody identity in space through simultaneous communication.

Moreover, the many working groups of OG provide smaller forums for activists with specific interests to strategize and then present proposals to the general assembly. This platform fosters myriad forms of creativity and resistance that enrich activists' understandings of citizenship. However, there is also contestation, particularly when the affinity in working groups may not be shared with other working groups or the occupation as a whole. For instance, the community outreach working group focused on integrating more of the concerns of the poor and black community by going door to door in these neighbourhoods and visiting churches. While there was often consensus at general assemblies that outreach was important, not many people participated in these efforts. Participation was high, though, during creative direct action activism. For example, there was a picket in front of Gainesville' s largest mall, which culminated with an action by the 'Radical Cheerleaders' who shouted anti-corporate and pro-Occupy cheers in the food court while passing out fliers. They also carried out a series of 'radical pub crawls' where protestors marched through the heart of the nightlife district of Gainesville, handing out fliers, talking to patrons of bars and clubs and chanting various slogans. Thus, horizontal platforms facilitate a collective spatialized identity, while also allowing room for that identity to be challenged and rearticulated.

### *Portals*

Portals are communication tools. Crucial for any social movement is effective communication required to garner support, resources and legitimation. Technological developments in media radically alter the means by which messages are conveyed. With the mass production of printing presses in the eighteenth century, books, newspapers and pamphlets became more accessible to commoners and literacy rates rose. These developments allowed the messages of those seeking change to quickly disseminate and transcend spatial, social and political boundaries. Similarly, the ubiquity of television and the impact of visual images on nightly newscasts, protestors being attacked by police dogs or bloody Vietnam battlefields can hardly be overstated. Today, the pace of technological

change has greatly accelerated, launching a 'digital revolution'. Social movement organizations are among the first to recognize the potential of such tools, and the on-line footprint of activist groups is huge. For instance, a Google search for 'FNB' yields over 39,000,000 results, while 'OWS' yields 115,000,000.

Similarly, social media, particularly Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, play key roles in organizing and mobilizing protest. The use of social media to notify people of real-time events, such as actions, arrests and police brutality, is significant. Many have emphasized the role these tools have recently played, particularly in the Green Revolution and in the so-called 'Arab Spring' with some calling these 'Twitter revolutions' (Howard & Hussain, 2011). Others, however, point out that the value of these tools is overstated because they result in impenetrable deluges of anonymous, unvetted information controlled by capitalists (Schillinger, 2011). Nevertheless, the role of social media is clear within the FNB and OG cases, where both used the same tools to mobilize activists in virtual and real space.

The Internet activist group, Anonymous, played an instrumental role in supporting FNB's efforts to feed the homeless. Much like the non-hierarchical OG and FNB, this loose coalition of 'hacktivists' used various Internet platforms to coordinate activist efforts through consensus decision-making. Their public profile has grown through hacktivism on matters of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. In what they dubbed 'Operation Orlando' Anonymous took down the websites for the Florida Chamber of Commerce, Orlando International Airport, Universal Orlando Resort, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orlando, the Rotary Club of Orlando and Buddy Dyer's campaign website. They encouraged people to boycott Orlando until the city stopped arresting FNB activists.

In the OG case, the role of social media is prevalent, as Facebook became the main coordinating device. For those unable to attend events, this medium was used to engage in open dialogue on matters of importance. Moreover, the use of livestreaming technologies allowed people to watch general assemblies, thus creating more transparency about OG decision-making. Livestreaming also monitored direct actions, which provided video evidence of events and potential recourse for police brutality.

### *Places*

Places are the physical locations for platforms and the communication of portals. The unauthorized occupation of these places has affected the formation of the modern state and citizen (Tarrow, 1998; Tilly, 1978). The reclaiming of space as a social movement tactic became common place in the mid-20th century as civil rights activists sat at segregated lunch counters, refused to give up seats on buses and marched on public thoroughfares. Northern White activists challenged spatial mores by their mere presence in the South. Meanwhile on college campuses, sit-ins, lie-ins and teach-ins were common occurrences as students protested myriad perceived injustices. Such periods of increased direct action follow crises and bring attention to the importance of occupying space. Following a period of abeyance, the food and financial crises stimulated a new wave of spatial confrontation, which the OG and FNB cases highlight.

The willingness to be arrested in order to assert the rights to peaceably assemble is fundamental to both OG and FNB. With the arrest of FNB activists, a collective spatialized identity evolved around standing up for the right to feed the hungry. FNB's cofounder Keith McHenry argued that

While we are getting brutalized, at least we have been stopping this current wave of anti-homeless and anti-meal laws. If we had not put up resistance in Orlando, there were going to be limitations on sharing free meals with the hungry all over the United States. (Swirko, 2011)

Yet, the formation of spatialized identities is multiscalar, historically contingent and often a product of what Meyer and Whittier (1994) refer to as ‘social movement spillover’ . Many of those active in OG have reenergized Gainesville’ s FNB chapter. Given the anarchist roots/sympathies of both FNB and the Occupy movement, it is unsurprising that their trajectories have intersected. There is a mutually constitutive process by which these activists link struggles against neoliberalization to place-based non-violent direct action, consensus decision-making and the provisioning of human essentials (i.e. food, water, shelter and community).

The importance of the distinct, yet inter-related spatialities of contentious politics was reinforced for many OG and FNB activists at the 2012 Republican National Convention (RNC) in Tampa, Florida. A week before activists converged to protest the RNC, the ‘FNB World Gathering’ provided a week-long series of workshops and gatherings on knowing your rights, building solidarity, consensus decision-making, non-violence and reclaiming the commons. In the spirit of linking multiple struggles, Occupy the RNC had specific days dedicated to coordinated and decentralized direct actions regarding economic rights, human rights, peace and the environment. Thus, places provide, yet are simultaneously imbued with myriad identities, geographies and histories, all of which are mobilized in these moments of creative resistance to show that another world exists/is possible.

When many people are arrested for occupying space, like at ‘localized global actions’ (FNB World Gathering/Occupy RNC) and ‘globalized local actions’ (Orlando FNB and OG), this often reinforces the collective belief that the state selectively uses the law to undermine citizens’ rights to the city.<sup>9</sup> To highlight one example of the solidification of a spatialized identity in the convergence space of Bo Diddley Plaza, an OG activist arrested for occupying the plaza said

I want to thank you all. Since returning home from the Army I have had a hard time relating or belonging anywhere, but you folks have made me feel right at home. It was an honor to take the plaza with all of you brave men and women. (Facebook posting, November 2011)

The plaza is home. OG is home. These expressions of spatial citizenship are tied not only to place in a general sense, but to fundamentally altering activists’ understanding of how to be publically and politically active in an era where neoliberalization is redefining public space as apolitical, commodified and policed space, thereby leading to a collective spatialized identity.

### Conclusion: Towards Collective Spatialized Identities

Many global struggles against the crises of neoliberalization can now be understood as decentralized struggles to occupy and transform public space into places that resist commodification and state surveillance. Simultaneously, activists are creating/demanding socially and economically just places through ongoing processes of direct action, the



contested politics of identity as well as ideology formation and solidarity building. As the cases of OG and FNB highlight, the formal promises of citizenship, such as the right to freely assemble and demand redress for grievances, can act as a springboard for developing a spatial citizenship that links the inability of state and privately controlled land to meet human needs. Confluences of political identities united by visions of post-capitalist and post-statist alternatives are actively producing new forms of citizenship free(r) of commodification and centralized authority. Thus, there is generative potential in what Featherstone (2008) refers to as 'maps of grievances', whereby political solidarities arise through the messy process of political struggle.

This process involves the distinct spatialities of power mutually constituted by dynamic formations of a collective spatialized identity. Our cases further a processual, dynamic understanding of activist mobilizations to reduce the uneven burdens of neoliberalization. In short, research on the social movement dynamics between geographies of power, identity formation and occupying space (Featherstone, 2008; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006; Routledge, 2003) can be advanced through attention to the varying combinations of platforms, portals and places and their effectiveness.

The financial and food crises and their aftermaths focused the public's grievances on the role institutions play in controlling space, resulting in many individuals previously disengaged with the political realm asserting a right to public space. However, many of these struggles unsettle the general claim of a 'right to the city', given their reliance on inclusive, consensus-based platforms and open source portals. Our findings resonate with Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) who contend that because these everyday practices and negotiations are simultaneously anti-, despite- and post-capitalist, they are often experimental and contingent. These spatial citizens are attempting to produce more equitable and democratic spaces autonomous from the commodified ones which dominate our cities by revealing the inadequacy of the voter booth and the importance of physical occupation. Once in the streets, personal relationships and their emotional resonance forge new identities, which congeal around the importance of communal prefigurative political projects that challenge the rhetoric, culture and practice of individualized politics (i.e. one person, one vote) and economics (i.e. consumer choice). The process of formation, though, includes contestation within movements, evidenced here in the conflicts among OG activists and the homeless community. Nevertheless, the forms of spatialized identity investigated in this article show how universal claims of a right to occupy space provide a cornerstone for activists to build a movement capable of embracing different political and social identities. Thus, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the processes by which collective spatialized identities are formed to challenge structural inequality and to prefigure unity through diversity in ongoing dialectics of political transformation.

## Notes

1. We see neoliberalization as the *process* by which public resources and spaces are privatized, public expenditures reduced, regulations on businesses eliminated and state governance devolved to local governments, the private sector and trans-/international bodies. In short, neoliberalization is the reification of market mechanisms to actualize human potential. Seeing neoliberalization as a process means this political-economic project is open to contestation.
2. We think that Routledge's (2003) idea of 'convergence space' can be furthered by investigating how activists create/contest such spaces at a local level embedded within a single social movement.
3. Roughly 6 million Americans lost homes.

4. For a discussion on root and proximate causes of the recent food crises, see Holt-Gimenez, Patel, and Shattuck (2009), McMichael (2009) and Brown (2011).
5. For an example of recent mobilizations around food as a means by which to challenge capitalism and racism, see Sbicca (2012).
6. The USDA (2009) defines food security at a minimum as '(1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies)' .
7. Rollback neoliberalism entails deregulation and dismantlement of state services, while rollout neoliberalism entails governments increasing policing and surveillance in the face of increased resistance by marginalized groups.
8. Gainesville Sun, July 14, 2009: <http://www.gainesville.com/article/20090714/ARTICLES/907149911>.
9. Our research confirms the findings of Routledge (2003), which point to the identity-based and place-specific challenges that arise in/through convergence spaces that seek to create environmental and social justice at all scales.

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